

The Mouths of Babes by YumKiwiDelicious

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Summary:

“Tessa Hargrove says she has two grandmas and grandpas,” she informed, “Because her mommy has a mommy and daddy and her daddy has a mommy and daddy. But only daddy has a mommy and daddy.”

To anyone else it would have sounded like a jumble of nonsense from the mouths of babes, but Nancy caught the gist of what her daughter was trying to say. She wanted to know why her and Steve’s parents were not in the picture even though Nana Joyce and Pop-Pop Hopper were around all the time.

~Nancy/Jonathan/Steve have a daughter named Barb and she's awesome~

The Mouths of Babes

“Why can’t we have Thanksgiving at our house?”

Nancy sighed warmly, sloshing water on the side of the tub as she finished lathering the shampoo into her daughter’s hair. To save on time they were taking a bath together before they had to rush to Jonathan’s childhood home to help finish preparing dinner. Barb’s hair was fluffy with suds as was Nancy’s and the two Wheeler women were just about ready to hop out.

“Because we don’t have enough rooms for grandma and grandpa, Aunt Eleven, and *both* your uncles to spend the night,” she explained before guiding her daughter to lean her head back to have water poured over it. She reached for the comb as Barb huffed, face scrunched up in thought.

“We could all have a sleepover in the living room!” the little girl enthused, causing more water to splash up as she wiggled with excitement.

Nancy snorted a short laugh imagining her whole mixed matched family attempting to camp out in their tiny living room. Barb squished between Steve and Jonathan on the floor while Nancy and Joyce shared the couch. Will, Mike, and Eleven building a childish fort between the wall and the armchair where Jim would stay propped up and snoring all night. It’d be cramped, cozy chaos.

“Maybe next year, hon,” the young mother hummed, continuing to comb out her child’s tangled curls.

Barbara went back to splashing around in the water, dunking and diving her one bath toy, a knight shaped figurine from Will, while creating the dramatic sounds of an aquatic battle complete with explosions and pained cries. Nancy listened intently, working out knots from bottom to top as Barb’s knight faced perilous extremes towards the front of the tub. She could hear Steve and Jonathan bickering lightly in the kitchen about when exactly they were meant to take out the sheet of cookies Nancy had set to bake before preparing their bath. It was an old recipe of her mother’s and if not

timed perfectly the whole batch would be ruined.

She dumped more water over Barb's hair and made her giggle. The girl's curls were battling against the weight of the water, trying to bounce back up to their usual volume. Nancy had a sneaking suspicion who she got those ringlets from, but never so pressing that she investigated it any further than staring intently. Anyone that thought to comment on the girl's resemblance to either Jonathan or Steve was usually immediately driven to apologize when the girl pointed out that she looked like *both* her daddies. Which she did. She looked like her mother too.

"Mommy?"

"Mhm?"

"How come I only have one grandma and grandpa?"

Nancy's fingers froze at the crown of her daughters head where they were attempting to part her wild curls down the middle. The battle towards the front of the tub had finally reached its end, the knight sinking into a watery grave as Barb blinked down on him.

"What do you mean, honey?"

The water swirled in a vortex as Barbara Wheeler spun around to face her mother in the tub, wayward drops splashing up into both their faces. Her face was pink from being scrubbed clean at the start of the bath and her eyelashes clung together with droplets of water falling off. Nancy blinked down on her.

"Tessa Hargrove says she has two grandmas and grandpas," she informed, "Because her mommy has a mommy and daddy and her daddy has a mommy and daddy. But only daddy has a mommy and daddy."

To anyone else it would have sounded like a jumble of nonsense from the mouths of babes, but Nancy caught the gist of what her daughter was trying to say. She wanted to know why her and Steve's parents were not in the picture even though Nana Joyce and Pop-Pop Hopper were around all the time. The young woman blew a breath out

through her lips, eyes comically wide for the girl's benefit as she processed the inquiry.

Her and Steve never spoke about their parents anymore. Never spoke to their parents anymore. Never saw their parents anymore. As soon as the Wheelers had found out Nancy was pregnant out of wedlock they had disowned her, blocking her entrance to their home and cutting her off from her brother. It wasn't until Mike was 18 and legally able to communicate with whoever he wanted that he had come by and met his niece and hugged his sister for the first time in years.

Similarly when the Harringtons had found out that Steve was going to stick around to raise a child that he only might have fathered, along side the man who was the other suspect, all out of wedlock, they quickly shut him out of their lives. Unlike Nancy's parents they also moved away for good measure, not wanting their son's proclivities to tarnish their good name anymore than he already had after he'd started carrying on with the rumoured loose Nancy Wheeler and That Byers Boy. Nancy's parents had remained in town as if to announce publicly 'Look! Look, we've disowned her! We do not approve!'

Only Joyce had stuck around. Only Joyce had listened as three teenagers on the very cusp of adulthood had sat down and told her they were going to raise a baby together. That they were all together. Nancy, Steve, Jonathan, all them, were together and in love and were expecting a baby and wanted her to know. She'd cried, but they were happy tears. She'd swept Nancy into her arms and then pulled her son in as well. When she'd spotted Steve hovering on the edge of oblivion she'd nearly bit his head off to join the huddle, crying that she now had three sons.

With Joyce came Will and Hopper and with Hopper came Eleven and those had been the only people in their lives for a long time. The only people that gave them a place to stay when they were young and broke. The only people that planned and attended Nancy's baby shower. The only people sitting in the uncomfy hospital waiting room chairs to hear the news that Barbara Joyce Wheeler had entered the world. When Mike turned 18 their family got a little bigger, but that was it. They had never needed anyone else, never reached out to

anyone else. Mike seemed to be giving their parents the cold shoulder until they spoke to Nancy and Steve's parents hadn't left him so much as a forwarding address.

It had never occurred to Nancy to explain any of this to her child since Barbara certainly was not lacking love in her life, but she had also never examined the thought that it may one day just come up on its own. After all other people's family situations met the status quo even if hers did not and the status quo called for more than one set of grandparents according to Tessa Hargrove. Nancy made a mental note to phone Billy one of these days to give him a piece of her mind,

"Well, honey," she began slowly, Barb's eyes trained on her, the bath water growing frigid, "You know how daddy and Nana Joyce are very close?"

"Daddy's best friend is Nana Joyce," Barb beamed, clasped hands breaching the surface of the tub water before splashing back down again.

Nancy frowned good-naturedly and nodded. Around the time she was entering first grade Barbara had become unusually fixated on the idea of 'best friends'. She'd proclaimed that each person could only have one and that that one person would remain their best friend forever and ever. With such guidelines she'd been particularly vexed when her mother had stated her best friends were her daddies and had refused to pick a favorite. Steve had similarly announced that both of his partners were his best friends, telling her the rule of only having one wasn't true. Only Jonathan had met expectations and promptly answered that his own mother was his best friend which matched with how close he and Joyce had become during the pregnancy and beyond.

If Barb was hurt that none of her parents had declared *her* their best friend she hid it with all the grace and dignity of someone far older than her.

"Yes, well," Nancy went on, "Me and your papa aren't...friends with your other grandmas and grandpas." She eyed her daughter, seeing if this news would be taken poorly. Barb just stared at her. "We don't agree on a lot of things so we decided that...maybe one grandma and

grandpa is enough?”

Her absolutely abysmal speech ended on an upward inflection, as if she were asking the little girl if they'd made the right choice in cutting her off from nearly half of her extended family. The decision, though honestly made completely without them, had torn Steve and Nancy up for a lot of years where only the Byers had been there to comfort them. Their unwavering presence and support had made the absence of the Harringtons and Wheelers seem far less daunting over time and if Nancy were to be honest it had been years since she'd had a passing thought of her parents unless Mike made an offhand comment on something they were up to. It had never occurred to her that her daughter may notice and suffer their absence.

If Barb was suffering from the absence of the four adults that had decided she was an abomination and disgrace to their good names before she was even born she hid it with all the grace and dignity of someone far older than her.

She merely gave a contented little 'oh' before turning back to the front of the tub, her knight resurrecting himself from the watery depths. Her mother watched her resume her play seeming completely unaffected by the news and wondered if she would always stay this uncaring and aloof about the people that would scorn her very existence.

“They are.”

“What, honey?” Nancy asked, having gotten lost in her thoughts as Barb splashed about near the spout. In that second she'd had a flash forward to Barb as a teen with wild hair and hard opinions and three parents. The little girl glanced very briefly around her wayward curls at her mother, possibly checking that she actually had her attention this time.

“Nana Joyce and Popper are enough,” she clarified, her common bumbling of Hopper's honorific falling like water droplets into the tub. “I only want people around that make you and Papa happy.”

From the mouths of babes.

Nancy was right in the middle of blinking back a sudden onset of tears when Steve barged into the bathroom, the door never having been closed in the first place. His hands were rubbing together likely in an attempt to keep them out of his hair which was already standing on edge from being yanked on. The too sweet smile on his face let Nancy know right away that he and Jonathan had ruined the cookies. She shot him a watery grin.

"We about ready to go?" he asked, plastering an excited grin on his face as Barb immediately hopped up to greet him, bowling water up over the edge of the tub to the tiled floor below. "There's my girl!"

"Papa!" she crowed, arms out and knight forgotten at the bottom of the tub as Steve grabbed a towel to wrap her up in. "Mommy said next Thanksgiving we can have a big sleepover in the living room!"

Nancy sputtered as her only child was lifted up out of the tub and Steve looked at her like that cat that had got the canary. She was stunned Barbara could completely nix the larger part of the conversation to focus on the only part that had really mattered to her to begin with. She had no clue the gravity her question had brought to her mother's heart.

"Did she?" Steve crooned, holding their sopping wet daughter on his hip and trying in vain to run the towel over her hair, "That does sound pretty fun."

Barb agreed whole heartily and set to talking her father's ear off as he carried her out of the bathroom towards her room to get dressed. Her bubbly voice drifted down the hallway and Nancy could only huff out a bemused laugh as she settled down in the tepid water. Her eyes had barely drifted shut to focus her senses on Barb's fading voice when there was a knock on the door frame. Jonathan was leaning there, smiling warmly at her as was his habit and she returned the gesture readily.

"Ready to go?" he roped gently, not wanting to drag her from a moment he could see was one of great peace. Nancy sighed happily and reached for the plug.

"Yes."